

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01

USIA-06 PRS-01 SP-02 PM-04 NSC-05 SS-15 EB-07 AID-05

(ISO) W

----- 037670

R 091200Z NOV 76

FM AMCONSUL ASMARA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4207

AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

INFO AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON

COMNAVTELCOM WASHDC

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN

COMIDEASTFOR

NAVCOMMUNIT ASMARA

NAVCOMMSTA NEA MAKRI

CNO WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 0885

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ETRN, PINS ET

SUBJECT: TRANSPORTATION SCENE

REF: ASMARA 0699 (DTG 080620Z SEP 76)

1. THE MONTH OF OCTOBER WITNESSED AN UNUSUAL AMOUNT OF ROAD TRANSPORTATION ACTIVITY IN ERITREA. THE LAST TURNAROUND OF CONVOYS IN ASMARA OCCURRED IN JUNE, AS EPMG AUTHORITIES APPEARED UNWILLING TO RISK VEHICLES AND FREIGHT IN THE FACE OF REPORTED INSURGENT DETERMINATION TO HARASS OR INTERCEPT THESE CONVOYS. DURING THIS PERIOD, BOTH THREATS AND DISCREET ATTEMPTS AT CAJOLING THE INSURGENTS INTO PACIFYING CAME TO NAUGHT.

2. IN OCTOBER, WITH THE APPROACH OF THE HARVEST IN THE ERITREA AND
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TIGRE HIGHLANDS, THE EPMG AUTHORITIES DISCOVERED AND EXPLOITED

A SIGNIFICANT INSURGENT VULNERABILITY. AT THIS POINT EPMG THREATS OF REPRISAL AGAINST THE CIVILIAN POPULATION INCLUDED A WARNING THAT AN INSURGENT ATTACK ON THE CONVOYS WOULD RESULT, NOT ONLY IN THE DESTRUCTION OF THE VILLAGES, BUT ALSO OF THE RIPENING CROPS. THIS TACTIC PROVED EFFECTIVE AND A 900-TRUCK SOUTHBOUND CONVOY DEPARTED ASMARA ON OCTOBER 18, AND PASSED THROUGH ERITREA AND TIGRE WITHOUT INCIDENT. THE CONVOY WAS TRANSPORTING A MASSIVE BACKLOG OF MANUFACTURES SUCH AS CEMENT AND SALT FROM MASSAWA, AND TEXTILES, SHOES, EDIBLE OILS, BEER, CLOTHING, AND HOUSEHOLD UTENSILS FROM ASMARA.

3. EMBOLDENED BY THIS SUCCESS A 500-TRUCK NORTHBOUND CONVOY, WHICH HAD BEEN STALLED FOR SEVERAL MONTHS IN ADIGRAT, WAS ESCORTED TO ASMARA AND ARRIVED UNHINDERED ON OCTOBER 31. IN ADDITION TO FOODSTUFFS SUCH AS SORGHUM, TEFF, AND PEPPER, THIS CONVOY CARRIED SOME NIGER SEED AND LENTILS FOR PROCESSING IN ASMARA. MOST OF THE FOODSTUFFS WERE CONSIGNED TO THE ETHIOPIAN ARMY TO REPLENISH DEPLETED RESERVES. A 40-TRUCK CONVOY LEFT ASMARA ON NOVEMBER 6 WITH SUPPLIES FOR THE GARRISONS AND POPULACE OF DECAMERE AND SAGANEITI. THERE ARE REPORTS THAT A CONVOY IS BEING PLANNED FOR KEREN AND THAT SIZEABLE EPMG FORCES WILL BE DEVOTED TO THE ESCORT DETAIL. IT IS THOUGHT, HOWEVER, THAT INSURGENTS WHO HAVE BEEN HEAVILY ENGAGED WITH EPMG TROOPS IN THE KEREN REGION ARE MUCH LESS LIKELY TO PERMIT THIS CONVOY THROUGH.

4. THE COTTON CONVOY WHICH DEPARTED BARATTOLO'S TESSENNEY PLANTATION IN SEPTEMBER WAS BADLY BATTERED BY INSURGENTS DESPITE ITS BEING ESCORTED BY A BATTALION-SIZE FORCE AIRLIFTED FROM ASMARA. THE CONVOY WAS FINALLY ABANDONED IN AGORDAT AND THE ESCORT RETURNED TO ASMARA BY AIR. THE BARATTOLO PLANT, WHICH HAD BEEN COMPELLED TO SUSPEND OPERATIONS IN LATE AUGUST (REFTEL), RESUMED PARTIAL OPERATIONS IN LATE SEPTEMBER BY AIRFREIGHTING RAW COTTON IN FROM TENDAHO IN SOUTHERN ETHIOPIA BY DC-6. THIS EFFORT WAS HALTED WHEN AN EAL DC-6 BROKE ITS LANDING GEAR AND WAS RENDERED UNSERVICEABLE. SOME RAW COTTON IS REPORTEDLY ARRIVING INTERMITTENTLY VIA MASSAWA, A TRANSPORTATION ROUTE STILL NOT BEING FULLY UTILIZED, ALTHOUGH CONVOYS TRAVEL DAILY WITHOUT HINDERANCE.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION, POLITICAL STABILITY, HIGHWAY TRANSPORTATION, TERRORISTS, ERITREA
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 09 NOV 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: BoyleJA
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976ASMARA00885
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760422-0360
From: ASMARA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19761168/aaaachaa.tel
Line Count: 98
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 ASMARA 699
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: BoyleJA
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 18 MAR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <18 MAR 2004 by morefirh>; APPROVED <13 SEP 2004 by BoyleJA>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: TRANSPORTATION SCENE
TAGS: ETRN, PINS, ET
To: STATE ADDIS ABABA
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006